

Album from a Ruinous Youth

by Sean Cridland

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New 991 Carrera cabriolet hugs a coastal road in the Grand Canary Islands. Greg Brown takes us there, beginning on page 2. Porsche Werkfoto.

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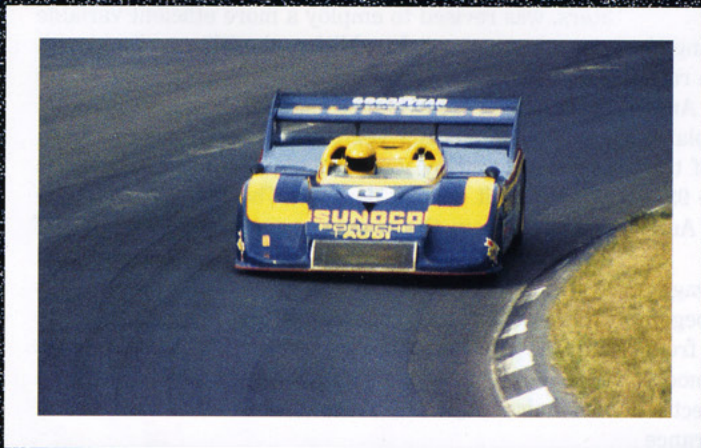
Roger Penske



Jacky Ickx



Graham Hill



Mark Donohue's 917/30



Jo Siffert 1970



It was a world of Carroll Shelby T-shirts and "Dan Gurney for President" stickers

ALBUM FROM A RUINOUS YOUTH

BY SEAN CRIDLAND

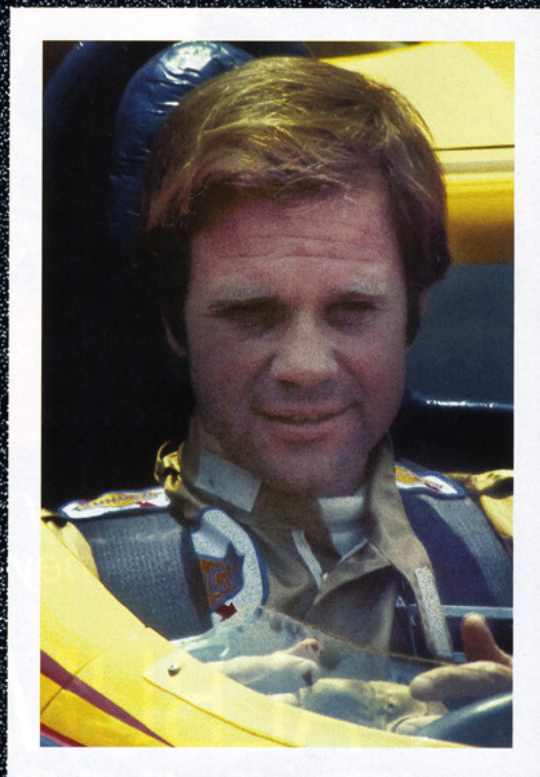
Given that PCA is looking at ways to increase family participation, I offer my own experience as a member of a sports car family in the 1960s. Sometimes I kid my parents by telling them that if they had brought me up in more modern times they would be liable for a child-abuse lawsuit. Taking me out of school for week-long ski trips to Mad River Glen in Vermont, dropping me off with my backpack at age 15 in the Adirondacks for two-week solo sojourns that ended whenever I decided to hitchhike home, leaving me to my own devices with the family ski-boat when I was 12, tooling me around



Peter Gregg and the Brumos 911



Peter leads Mark



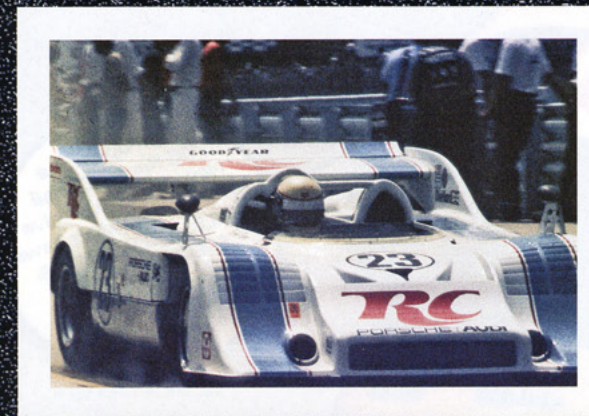
Mark Donohue 1973

People would just stand waiting for cars and drivers to come out and would respectfully part for their heroes to come through.

seeing all the very cool cars and interesting people that were there. That's when I saw my first Ferraris and Aston Martins. My parents even bought me a Carroll Shelby t-shirt that had his trade-mark CS logo that looked like a race-track and a "Dan Gurney for President" window sticker. I remember that Doctor Dick Thompson won the Glen 500 that year in a black Corvette Stingray, romping on all the Elvas, MGs, Porsches and a couple of club-racing Cobras. No one was even close. By then I was hooked. How bad is that? A sports car addict at age eight.

When the U.S. Grand Prix rolled around that fall in early October I was all amped up. The copies of *Road & Track*, *Car and Driver*, and *Sports Car Graphic* that were lying around the house began to mean something to me and were probably the largest impetus for me to learn how to read better. And the pictures were *very cool*. By the time we got to the F1 race that fall, I knew practically all the players with as much detail as my school friends did about their stick and ball heroes.

Watkins Glen became an orgy of cool cars and people. If the cars weren't running when you got there,



Follmer and the 917/10 in 1973



Vasek Polak and Jody Scheckter

on "the hump" of either the MGB or Triumph TR4A when I was eight, nine, and ten, and taking me out of school on the Thursdays before the U.S. Grand Prix at Watkins Glen or the Trans-Am at Lime Rock are not the kinds of things parents think about these days when considering their children's "best interests!"

I could never figure out what the other kids in my school were getting all excited about when they were going on about the latest stick or ball game on TV during the weekend. We'd either been skiing on the toughest hill in New England (Mad River Glen: Ski It If You Can!), waterskiing, cruising around in one of the sports cars, or watching the likes of Graham Hill, John Surtees, Jim Clark, Dan Gurney, et al in some of the world's coolest machines in one of the most hallowed of sports car racing eras: the '60s and early '70s. But don't get me wrong. My family wasn't wealthy by any stretch of the imagination. Monday through Friday we lived very frugally, with my mother telling more than several stories of wondering how we would make it through any particular year. My dad had a civil service

job as a civilian with the Air Force at the SAC base in Rome, New York. My mom took whatever jobs were available in our little industrial town. It's just that we...spent well!

But the focus of this story is some of the photos I shot when I was just a kid. I can't really remember much about the first sports car race that I attended other than it was at Lime Rock in about 1962, I was tremendously bored and whiny, and my dad tremendously disappointed that I wasn't more impressed. That is until someone went sailing off of the big looping corner at the end of the long front straight. That got me to perk up, and my dad still tells me about how *relieved* he was when I finally took an interest in auto racing. See what kind of parents I have?

A couple of years later we went to Watkins Glen for the annual August event, the Glen 500. I had a much better time because it was fun to ride there in the MG and I got to ride in my dad's friend's XKE coupe, with the three windshield wipers. We had a really great time walking through Watkins Glen State Park and



Clay Regazzoni and Ferrari



George Follmer
and Roger
Penske

the next best thing was to head over to the Kendall Oil Tech Garage. By today's standards, it was a pitiful little building that housed all the team cars except for Ferrari, who used to garage their cars down in the town of Watkins Glen and drive them to the track and back, a tradition they kept up all the way into the '70s!

Crammed into that little building would be the Formula One teams of BRM, Lotus, Honda, Cooper, Brabham, the independents BRP-BRM, Bruce McLaren's fledgling team, Ecurie Ecosse, Ecurie Bonnier and a few others. The mechanics would be practically crawling over each other and the drivers used whatever corner was free of grease and tools to sit and monitor the progress of their cars' preparation. When practice sessions began, drivers or mechanics would jump in the car and drive it down the third of a mile or so to the pits on an open, semi-paved road that was unfenced to the unwashed masses. People would just stand waiting for cars and drivers to come out and would respectfully part for their heroes to come through. There was little or no crowd control, just people who were by and large polite. That's how I caught my first glimpses of Innes Ireland, Mike Spence, Graham Hill, Dan Gurney, a very young Jackie Stewart and the great John Surtees, champion on two wheels and four. Not to mention the great F1 and sports cars of the time.

It wasn't much longer before I noticed the kinds of photos I saw in the magazines were much different than the snapshots that my dad and brother were taking and that some "special" photographers got to shoot from inside the fences, fairly close to the racing surface (as in leaning on the barriers!) and they were using very long lenses. As a ten year-old, I wasn't going to be able to do that. I just barely had my little

110 Kodak Instamatic. Still, I was determined. My brother and I have always had a rivalry when it comes to knowledge and experience of motor racing. Because he was older and more emphatic than me, it was hard for me to carry much authority so I had to rely on the photos I took to get my point across. That's when I realized the advantage of being a kid.

Here's an example. In 1964, Ford was a major player in sports car racing and was a sponsor of the U.S. Grand Prix. That meant they had lots of their motorsports cars floating around for people to gawk at. One of them was an early version of the Ford GT. It was just sitting out in the infield with no guard to speak of other than some guy who was sitting in the car keeping an eye on it. That someone was none other than 1961 World Champion Phil Hill who showed me how the switches worked and what the gauges meant. I gathered that he was only letting me in because I was a kid, since he chased away several of the adults who laid fingers on the car. Phil was one of the early drivers of the Ford GT who scared the Ferrari drivers badly when he passed them on the Mulsanne Straight in 1964 in that same funny looking white car with the blue front bonnet. Of course it wouldn't be long before the funny-looking, but fast American cars would steamroll World Championship sports car endurance racing and be outlawed. And it wouldn't be Ferrari that retook the crown. It would be those other "funny looking" cars that had been buzzing around in the two-liter class: Porsches.

Within a few years I started to figure out how to get closer and closer to the cars even when I didn't have the big credentials. It was really just a matter of being in the right places at the right times. One of my school friends was a yearbook geek and was really getting



David
Hobbs

into cameras and photography. He had a Mamiya body and a 90-280mm zoom lens with a 2x adapter that took it up to 180-560 that he lent to me a couple of times. That meant even better views of the cars and drivers, even at long distances.

Then one of my skiing buddies figured out a pretty good scam. He was really good at chatting people up. He would go to the local radio stations and get in with the sports editors and ask for the credentials that would get sent out to all the upstate stations. None of them cared even an inch about sports car racing. They only cared about stick and ball sports. So we'd get the passes!

During the summer of 1973, when I was still 17, Jeff got us some passes and off we went in his beater of a TR6 to Watkins Glen, him only 18. Trouble was, you had to be 21 to get into the pits. We found this out at Watkins Glen High School, standing next to Jacky Ickx and George Follmer, while some other hapless parent was attempting to pick up credentials for their kid. Saving ourselves the trouble of being denied and our faces remembered, instead we beat a hasty exit to the nearest five and dime (no convenience stores in existence in 1973) and bought ourselves a couple of good pencils and erasers.

Maybe some of you can remember when driver's licenses were printed on cardboard with dot-matrix printers (high-tech!). There we were at a picnic table at that park right across the street from the Watkins Salt plant at the southern tip of Seneca Lake carefully erasing the dates on our licenses and re-drawing

the numbers so that I was now 23 (good thing I was tall for my age) and Jeff was 22. Then, it was back to Watkins Glen High School for registration where now Mark Donohue, Jo Siffert and a very young Hurley Haywood were picking up their credentials and we slipped right through with nary a glance. With the legends there, they never noticed the two young men who looked very young for their "age." Soon, we had our credentials for the newly revamped pit and garage areas and our invites to the world premier of *The Speed Merchants*. By this time in my life, my brother wouldn't even speak to me about auto racing!

That weekend was about a big a blast as you could imagine for a 17-year-old sports car junkie. We strolled around the pits like we owned the place. There's nothing like a full pit credential and a camera with a giant lens to embolden the spirit of a teenager. I thought nothing at all of just standing right in front of the stars of the day and snapping away, even if it meant delaying their exit from the pits or getting them to look more focused on the job at hand. I quickly learned that drivers, mechanics, and team owners were a lot like rock stars. They wanted to be imaged in a certain way. They somehow figured that if I had the credentials to be where I was, I was deserving of an intent pose. One of my favorites was a shot of Roger Penske. He walked toward me with a seriously grim look on his face as I focused the long lens in on him, only to break into a big grin immediately after I snapped the shutter.

It was almost too good to be true. Going to the premier of *The Speed Merchants* was even better: Sitting

There's nothing like a full pit credential and a camera with a giant lens to embolden the spirit of a teenager.

on the same aisle with George Follmer and Charlie Kemp and trying not to be too tall for Jacky Ickx and Mario Andretti to see around me was as good as seeing the movie itself. Maybe better! It was the culmination of an upbringing during which my parents brought me along to see and value probably one of the most exciting and historically important eras in motorsports.

I did make it two more times to the USGP at Watkins Glen, once in 1974 after I'd moved to Aspen with my new girlfriend and once in 1976 on a wild guys' trip across the U.S. In 1974, I used our old trick and appealed to the Aspen radio station to help me secure pit passes. We camped out at Watkins Glen rather than stay in one of the motels that became exorbitantly expensive during races. But it was a cold weekend and camping with my girlfriend in the snow was not something she bargained for. Nonetheless, the buzz of seeing F1 cars warmed us up and the ambience was not lost on her either. She loved meeting Lord Hesketh, his driver James Hunt, and the first celebrity engineer/designer, Dr. Harvey Postlethwaite, who were all as much into partying as they were into racing back in those days.

To warm up, we visited the bar of the famous Glen Motor Inn and had a drink with some chap with a British accent. No, he corrected us, New Zealand. Good conversation ensued and as we left we got around to introducing ourselves. "Eoin," he said, "Eoin Young!" Presumably, *he* wasn't camping out that weekend. The support races were pretty good too. The obsolete Can-Am Shadows put on a demonstration run to show why it was that the Can-Am died. And there was a Formula Atlantic race with a field that included Howdy Holmes, Tom Gloy, Keke Rosberg, Gilles and Jacques Villeneuve, and my eventual friend, Divina Galica (whom I met on the speed skiing circuit in the '80s). One could write an entire book on her exploits as a five-time Olympic skier, journeyman race-car driver, and girlfriend to Nick Mason, the Pink Floyd drummer and car collector extraordinaire). On the F1 side of things, the two Carlos's (Reutemann and Pace) were first and second for Bernie Ecclestone's Brabham team. Emerson Fittipaldi won the World Championship for McLaren.

I came back to the USGP one final time in 1976, but completely unprepared: no camera, no pit pass. But good fortune ensued. While lingering around outside of the pit area trying to get a glimpse into where I roamed freely only a couple of years before, I ran into two old friends. One was my high school skiing buddy that finagled all the passes for us when we were 16 and

17. He lent his pass to me for a few minutes so that I got to stand next to James Hunt while Stirling Moss interviewed him. I tried to get close enough to the Ferrari pits where Hunt's friend and racing arch nemesis Niki Lauda was back for his first race after his horrific burn accident at the Nürburgring that summer. But there was no doing. Ferrari was prepared for all the crass and classless paparazzi who just wanted to snap a photo of the now hairless and earless Lauda who was still racing with bleeding blisters on his face and head. Talk about being a *real* racer. I don't think they come much tougher than him.

The other friend I saw that weekend in the pits was my Aspen friend and former housemate Kenny Szymanski. Kenny was an American Airlines flight attendant with an intense love of racing. He eventually finagled his way into being the tire handler for several F1, CART, and IRL teams, including Lotus when Senna was there, Hass when Andretti and Mansell were there, and Ganassi when Zanardi was there. I didn't know that until I saw a story about him in *On Track* in 1986. He's still at it too! James Hunt was on a roll that year, winning the race and the championship. And that was the last professional auto race I ever attended in person. From then on I got distracted by the world of ski racing, bicycles and various and sundry other Aspen activities, post ski-career studies and travels, and didn't come back to cars until I got the 1990 C4 that I have today. It's good to be back! *



Me in 1974